

M.D. skills tests urged in Nevada

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CARSON CITY, Nev. — Amid the debate over medical malpractice insurance, Nevada may become the first state in the nation to require periodic competency examinations for doctors.

Nevada already has among the highest standards for the initial licensing of physicians, but it requires no continued testing. A license is automatically renewed every two years if the doctor completes 40 hours of education.

Donald Baepler, a member of the state Board of Medical Examiners, heads a committee that has been working on the proposed regulation for two years. He said it was partly in response to claims about doctors whose skills no longer measure up.

"There can't be more than a handful," Baepler said Sunday.

More than 5,000 physicians are licensed by the board.

Larry Matheis, executive director of the Nevada State Medical Association, which represents doctors, said he was not opposed to the proposal as long as the testing is relevant.

The board of medical examiners, which licenses and disciplines doctors, will hold workshops April 29 in Reno and April 30 in Las Vegas to take public comment about the proposed regulations. Baepler, of Las Vegas, said the board may take action at its meeting in late May.

The state requires new physicians to have three years of progressive medical education after receiving a medical degree, Baepler said. That is the highest standard in the nation for being admitted to practice.

Several other states have since followed Nevada's lead, he said.

Physicians certified by the

American Board of Medical Specialties would be exempt from regulation requirements. Those doctors are already examined periodically to maintain their certifications.

Also exempt would be physicians who have maintained active or associate hospital privileges at two nationally certified hospitals or medical centers for two years leading up to the testing.

Others would have to take a test every 10 years. Baepler estimated only 10 percent to 15 percent of the state's physicians would fall into this category.

Among the tests would be the Special Purpose Examination or one of the specialty examinations of the Federation of State Medical Boards.

Baepler said about 25 states are considering competency examinations for doctors.